

GOD BESEECHING SINNERS BY HIS MINISTERS

NO. 1124

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 27, 1873,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ,
and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God
was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;
and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation.
Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us:
we pray you in Christ's stead, be you reconciled to God.
For He has made Him to be sin for us,
who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”
2 Corinthians 5:18-21.*

MAN became God's enemy wantonly, without the slightest offense given on God's part, but man did not make advances towards reconciliation, or express regret because peace was broken. The first overtures for peace are not made by man, the offender, but by our aggrieved and offended God. Therefore our text begins with the declaration, “All things are of God.” Reconciliation of man to his Maker is never achieved by man, but is the work of God from first to last, and to God must be all the glory.

The text enforces this truth by giving us a brief summary. The Lord first finds the messengers of reconciliation by reconciling some men to Himself. He chooses His ministers, having called them into a state of reconciliation. Read the verse—“All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” The ambassador is sent, not from man to God, but from God to man. Then the matter of the ambassador's message is altogether of God, for it is God who has “reconciled the world unto Himself through Jesus Christ.” He gave His Son to be the atoning sacrifice by the ordained method of substitution—thus it is He alone, who has made a way of access between fallen man and Himself. Furthermore, the method by which this atonement is applied to the reconciling of men is also of God. It is not man who beseeches God, but God who beseeches man to be reconciled. It is not man who cries to Christ, but Christ prays man, through His ministers whom He places in His stead, to be reconciled to God. So that from the first thought of reconciliation, right on through the provision of the atonement, to the conclusion of the solemn league and covenant between the heart and God, all things are of God. I am glad to commence my sermon with such a weighty doctrine. I am glad to have such a theme with which to stir the hearts of the reconciled. You owe it all to God, my brethren, therefore render thanks unto the Most High, and never attribute to your own wills or to any natural goodness in yourselves, your present friendship with the Lord, for all this is of God who has reconciled you unto Himself.

In the process of reconciling the sinner to Himself, the Lord uses means. He might, if He had pleased, have influenced all human hearts by His Spirit, without a pleading ministry selected from among men, but He has not chosen to do so. God exercises His power over the human mind not miraculously, but in conformity with the laws of the mind. The Spirit of God beseeches and prays men to be reconciled. He deals with us not as with marble or wood, carving and shaping us by mere power. Acting upon the mind of man, He does not act according to the laws of matter, but deals with mind after the mode in which minds must be dealt with, and therefore His grace operates upon human wills by persuasion—“As though God did beseech you by us.” And by pleading—“We pray you, in Christ's stead, be you reconciled to God.” But the means used of the Lord are always such as will ensure that all the glory shall be to Him alone—if God beseeches, there can be no honor to man in yielding to the divine persuasion, but great glory is due to Him who in infinite condescension prayed to His own creatures, and

stooped from the loftiness of His glory to beseech His own rebellious subjects to have mercy upon themselves.

This morning I shall try to drive at the heart and conscience with all my might, depending upon the Spirit of God to make my appeals effectual. And with that aim, and no other, I shall first of all speak upon *the ambassadors of reconciliation*. Secondly, upon *the matter of their embassy*, the message they have to deliver. And, thirdly, we will speak upon *the manner in which they are to deliver their message*.

I. First, then, dear friends, we will begin with THE AMBASSADORS OF RECONCILIATION.

It appears, from the text that *they were once enemies to God*. “All things are of God, who has reconciled *us* to Himself.” Yes, beloved, when we beseech you to be reconciled to God, we give to ourselves no airs as though we were superior to you by nature, or had been superior in our former conduct before conversion. No, rather we are bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh. Are you sinful? Such were we. Are you rebellious against God? Such were we. Are your hearts hard? Such were ours. We do not look down upon you from an elevated platform of affected dignity, for we recognize our own nature in yours. Therefore we come to you as to fellow sinners, and albeit it is a sorrowful thing ever to have sinned, we are glad to think that we can speak to you of an evil which has vexed us, the power of which we have painfully felt and penitently mourned, as you must yet do. We hope that our former condition as sinners and unbelievers will make us speak to you more tenderly, and will enable us to reach your hearts the better. God might have sent angels to you, and you would, perhaps, at first have been awed by their glory. But their sermons would have been cold and unsympathetic compared with ours, for they could not know your misery and degradation as we do. They would have felt a horror of you, and would not have cared to come near you. Their purity would have made them regard you as a healthy man regards a leper. They must have done so, kind as no doubt they would have tried to be. But we have no such feelings. We have a horror of your sin, but not of you. And looking at you as being what we once were, we say to you, brothers and sisters by nature, we trust you will yet become brothers and sisters by grace, and that the blood of Christ, which has made peace between us and God, may also reconcile you to the great Father in heaven.

From the text we gather that though those who are now God’s ministers were once His enemies, *they are now reconciled*. They are no strangers to the reconciliation which they have to preach, for they have been reconciled themselves. Yes, we were by divine grace made to feel the evil of sin. We were led to know its bitterness in our inmost souls, and we were led to the cross, and led to look to the Savior nailed there for human sin. Our guilt disappeared, our burden rolled from our shoulders, and we were free. And now we feel no enmity towards God, but, on the contrary, a love to Him which we desire you to feel. We have no quarrel, now, with our Maker. We desire that He should always do what seems good to Him, for we are sure that His will is always kindness, wisdom, and love towards His people. And now as God’s friends, we speak to you, and tell you that He is a good Friend, and a kind Father, that He is willing to forgive, and does forgive, most freely, all those who come to Him by Jesus Christ. We have been reconciled, and therefore can speak to you, not theoretically, but experientially. We can tell you what we have tasted and handled of the good word of God and our hope is that, perhaps, you will be influenced by our testimony as that of men like yourselves who have ourselves been saved.

Moreover, it seems that *the ambassadors of God were reconciled to God by Jesus Christ* in the same way as other sinners. How very different is this confession from the boastings of priests and prelates nowadays. They are not of the same order as the people whom they address, but are reverend, and right reverend, and fathers in God. They speak not as sinners saved, called to be servants to their fellow sinners, but as Brahmins, who by the imposition of episcopal hands, have obtained magical powers wherewith to perform potent ceremonies which shall purify men from their sins. These are not such men as we are, but are very far above us, a superior race of beings—a sacred caste! Do you not observe how they fence off wherever they can one end of the church for themselves? That pen of theirs is holier than the place where the common people sit. Do you not observe how they array themselves in white, blue, and scarlet, and fine linen, because they are the depositories of mysterious powers which reside in none else? It is not that they are any better in character, nor that they have more zeal for the truth as it is in Jesus, nor that even the bishops excel in clearness of doctrine, or courage to defend the truth. Brethren, it is

preposterous that these men should claim so much when they have so little to show for it. Here are bishops who can bestow the Holy Spirit, and yet have not the manliness to speak out while the church is being Romanized, and even the abominable confessional is being set up. I could show tailors and cobblers who are more earnest for the gospel than the occupants of the episcopal bench. We are taught to believe that these wonderful beings, the bishops and priests, are God's clergy or heritage, and all the rest of us are mere stony laypersons who ought to do them reverence. I suppose the day will come when our fellow countrymen will bow their heads in the dust before a priest, and count themselves thrice blessed if they are but spit upon by their reverences. Not thus was it with ministers sent of God in Paul's day. Here is a man who is an apostle and an inspired man, and all he has to say of himself and other ambassadors is this—"All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ." No, dear hearers, we speak to you as brethren in one common fall, hoping that we may also be brethren in the great salvation. If ever I enter heaven I shall owe my cleansing to the blood of the Lamb—not one among you will owe more to the rich, free grace of God than I shall. No, there is not one among you who shall bow in humbler, lower gratitude than I shall before the throne of infinite mercy as he remembers his forgiven sins. Having sinned much, and had much forgiven, we feel we cannot love enough, and cannot too plainly tell the story of our dear Master's grace. And we feel that this is better for you than that we should be something superior to you, for we hope you will be won by a brother's testimony, by the story of one who has received the grace of God just as you must and is cleansed just as you must be.

Again, Paul tells us that the ministers of Christ, having been reconciled to God, have *a message to deliver which has been given to them*—"has given to us the ministry of reconciliation." And he repeats it—"has committed unto us the word of reconciliation." You see, we have nothing to tell you but what God has told us. We have not to stand in our pulpits, and utter original ideas, or to invent a gospel for you. No, we are simply the bearers of a message which God would have us deliver to you, and it is at our peril that we add to it, or take from it. In these days there is a great deal said about "thinkers," and by "thinkers" they mean men who startle their people with a fresh heresy every three months. God save us from such thinkers! I send my servant to the door with a message, and if on the way she, in her wisdom, deliberates and alters my message to suit her own views, I must discharge her, for I need someone who will bear *my* message, and not make one of her own. God would have His ministers be like transparent glass which lets the rays of the sun pass through unchanged, and not like painted windows which color all the rays after their own nature. Through infirmity we all give some amount of coloring to the gospel, but he is the man according to God's order of ministry who longs to let the gospel shine right through him, and does not send upon the people anything of his own except the earnestness which the gospel works in him as it streams through him. As some glass adds heat to light by concentrating the rays, so should the minister add heat to the gospel, but woe unto him if he adds anything beyond! Brethren, we have nothing to tell you which we have invented—so if you are saved by it, it will not be due to our skill. We have nothing to tell you but what God commits to us, and therefore God will have all the glory if your souls are saved.

Once more, and we add it with all sincerity, when we plead with sinners, our expectation of their being reconciled to God does not lie in our pleading, but in the work of the Holy Spirit. I never expected a sinner to be saved because of anything I said, or the way in which I said it. I have expected God to bless the word, and I have seen it blessed ten thousand times, glory be to His name! But I never reckoned that there was any force in my words, or that there could be any potency in the manner in which I spoke the truth. No, it is God beseeching you by us, who performs the work when He speaks through our lips, makes His own mind to rush like a torrent through our mind, and bears our mind away by its force. When He gives the utterance, and then, by His Spirit, applies it to the conscience and the soul, then are men reconciled to God, but by no other means. Therefore do we feel a trembling when we speak to you lest our Master should leave us to ourselves, and so we should fail to bless you; therefore do we never come to beseech you for God, without first beseeching God for you! We know that you will not be saved except the Spirit of God shall bless the word, therefore do we ask the prayers of our brethren as well as send to heaven our own, that the Lord will be pleased to take of the things of Christ, and by the Holy Spirit apply them to your souls.

So you see, the ambassadors of God are your brethren. Though I might in some respects magnify our office, for it is no small thing to be an ambassador for God, yet after all, we are as nothing in the matter. We cannot stand between you and God to take any share of praise—"We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord." We direct you to the Lord and the Lord alone, for, "All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation."

II. The second point of consideration is THE SUBJECT MATTER OF OUR MESSAGE—and first the faithful minister's message to the sons of men is this, that *reconciliation is only to be obtained towards God on the ground of substitution*. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." "For He has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." You cannot reconcile yourself to God by weeping and lamenting on account of your past sins. There is no efficacy in regret to blot out transgression. You cannot reconcile yourselves to God by any future arduous service. All that you can do is already due to God—you will have done no more than you ought to have done if you should be perfect all the rest of your days. Neither can you be reconciled to God by any ceremony of man's invention, nor even of God's ordaining. He has not made rites and outward forms to be the way of grace, and if you choose them, God will not choose you. There were many in the olden times who went about to establish their own righteousness, and would not submit themselves to the righteousness of Christ, and therefore, they failed of all reconciliation with God. But this is the plan of reconciliation—men were all lost and condemned, for there was no difference between the Jew and the Greek, they all lay under condemnation. Jesus came into the world, the eternal Son of God, and He took upon Himself our manhood in all its feebleness, that He might be our brother. He lived here for thirty years and more in poverty, obscurity, sorrow, and persecution, until at last He died. In His death He bore the whole burden of human sin. God laid upon Him the iniquity of His people, and on the cross Jesus suffered what His people ought to have suffered. What God's justice must have inflicted upon man for sin, He inflicted upon Christ. He laid the whole weight of His wrath upon Jesus. And now, this day, whoever will come to God by the way of the cross may come. Whoever will hide in the wounds of Jesus shall be free from the arrows of vengeance. "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." "He that believes in Him is not condemned." "Look unto Me and be you saved, all you ends of the earth," is the voice from the cross of Calvary. And a true voice it is, and whoever heeds it shall find eternal life. Reconciliation by the blood, by the substitutionary sacrifice of the infinite Son of God—this is the message of our ministry. If we do not testify this, it would be better for us that we had never been born. If we do not preach this constantly and incessantly, we have missed our main topic, we have failed in the great commission which our Master sent us to execute. We do declare it this day, in the name of the eternal God—O, sinners, there is forgiveness through the blood of Jesus! There is mercy, grace, pardon, heaven, for as many as believe in Jesus, the great Substitute for sin. But there is no other mode of reconciliation under heaven.

Then we are to tell men that *this reconciliation*, which was made by Christ through His substitution, *was not apart from God*, but that God was in Christ. We often tell you that Jesus Christ's sufferings removed the wrath of God from His people, and that saying is true, though sometimes it is stated in inaccurate language. Yet a great truth is intended by it. But mark this, you must never fall into the idea that God is revengeful and angry, and that the death of Jesus Christ, His Son, was necessary to pacify the Father. Beloved, you know better than this. You know that God was love before Jesus died, always love, always full of grace and truth towards His people. The fact is that the substitution made on Calvary was a substitution provided by God's love, for the Lord Himself, gave His own Son to die as a manifestation of love as well as a vindication of justice. God was in Christ; God came on earth to reconcile men, God made the atonement for us. God was not made to love us by the death of His Son, but because He loved us, and had mercy on us, therefore He gave His Son Jesus that the dishonor done to His law might be wiped out. That the difficulty which stood in the way of His mercy might be removed, that so He might be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly. Look at the cross in this light, O sinner, and I trust it may reconcile you to God. It is by that bloody sweat, that crown of thorns, that shame and suffering, it is by those five dear wounds, those extreme agonies, that God has removed all hindrance to your reconciliation. God Himself has given to you His Son, and He suffered in His Son that you might be reconciled to

Him. It is not Jesus, a stranger, who hangs there to gratify the Father's vengeance, God forbid—it is God who, in one of His divine persons, bears the penalty which the inflexible laws of right and justice demanded of sinful men. Oh, that you would come to Him, and be reconciled to Him by the death of His Son.

And now the third announcement of our message is this, that *in consequence of God's having reconciled the world to Himself in Jesus Christ, He is now able to deal with sinners as if they had never sinned*, for that is the long and the short of the expression, "Not imputing their trespasses unto them"? He treats sinners as if their sins were not theirs. They have sinned, and they do sin, but He does not put their sins down to their account. When He looks upon them in His mercy, and they are reconciled to Him, there are the sins, but He lays them upon His Son. "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." We are a mass of sin, but He does not account us such, for He has made *Him* to be sin for us, although He personally knew no sin. Substitution is a plan arranged by wisdom for the joint display of justice and mercy, and by its means the Lord comes near to us to commune with us, and gives us countless blessings. Having absolved and pardoned us, He blesses us as if we had never sinned.

Yes, and there is something more wonderful than that. God treats poor sinners who are reconciled to Him as if they were full of good works, for what does the text say? "He has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." What a grand expression! He makes us righteous through the righteousness of Jesus. No, not only makes us righteous, but *righteousness*. No, that is not all; He makes us the righteousness *of God*. That is higher than the righteousness of Adam in the garden. It is more divinely perfect than angelic perfection. He makes the guilty sinner, when he believes in Jesus, to be the "righteousness of God in Him." Never did lips have a sweeter message to deliver than mine. And I murmur not if my speech should seem feeble this morning, and if I cannot garnish my message with the flowers of oratory. God forbid I should try to do so! To you who are guilty, there was never a more important message delivered at any time, and having heard it, I charge it on your conscience that you value it and think it over, yes, and accept it. God grant you may.

We are, moreover, bidden to tell man that *the atonement of Christ is not confined to the Jew*, that God has not reconciled the Jewish nation to Himself, but the, "*world*." That is to say, Christ has died for all nations, classes, sorts and sizes. The atonement was not made for a class, but for all classes, not for the old exclusively, but for the young too, not for the young only, but for the old as well. This is such an atonement made by Christ upon the cross that it presents a warrant for every sinner born of woman to come to God, and say, "Lord, forgive me, for Christ has died." When we preach the gospel, it is in no stinted terms, looking about, and thinking that perhaps there might be half a dozen in the building to whom the gospel might honestly be spoken. But looking every man and woman in the face, we preach reconciliation by Jesus Christ to them, and point them to the atoning blood. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life." Let no man, woman, or child here say, concerning himself, that there is a difficulty with God which Christ has not removed. The difficulty is in your own soul, and if you are willing to be reconciled, as sure as you live, and as sure as God's Book is true, there is a reconciliation provided for you in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Oh what gladness it is to be allowed to speak thus.

And now we are to tell men that *there is nothing whatever needed in order to their reconciliation and acceptance with God except what Christ has already worked out*, for God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. Not reconciling it by some other means, but reconciling it by Christ, doing the work in Christ. You have not to bring Him your good works, or your tears, or your mortifications, or your feelings, or emotions, or anything of the sort. You have only to accept what God has provided. There is the propitiation, and if you say in your heart, "My God, I take it," you are reconciled to God by the death of His Son. Oh, go not abroad to heap together your vanities, for they cannot appease Him. Bring none of your vain oblations to Him. The incense of your self-righteousness will be an abomination to Him. Come as you are, defiled and filthy, polluted and wretched, and put your trust in what He has done in the person of His only-begotten Son, and you are reconciled unto God.

This, then, is the gospel message with which we are sent.

III. And now, thirdly, and very earnestly, I would speak to you a little upon THE MANNER IN WHICH THIS MESSAGE IS TO BE DELIVERED. The text tells us very plainly—

First, it is to be delivered *by beseeching* men, and praying to men. “As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you.” Then if I should merely tell you, dear hearers, the gospel, though God might bless it, I have not done all my duty. To inform the intellect is not the minister’s sole work. We are to proclaim, but we are to do far more—we are to beseech, and to pray. We are not merely to convince the intellect, but to beseech the heart. Neither are we only to warn and threaten, though that has its place, yet it is not to be our main work, we are to beseech! You know how a beggar bows his knees, and implores you when he is starving, that you will give him bread? With like earnestness we are bound to beseech you to be saved. You know how you will pray a fellow creature to help you when you are in sore distress? In that same way are we to pray you to be reconciled to God. As I ponder this, I feel self-condemned. I have besought you, and I have prayed you sometimes, but not as I ought to have done. Oh, to be taught how to beseech men, how to pray them! God forbid we should fall into the error of those who think beseeching and praying to be unlawful. It is the Christly principle which leads God’s ministers so to do. It is the main part of a minister’s business, and he who neglects it will have to answer for it before God’s great bar.

The text goes on to say that we are to beseech men *as though God did beseech them*. Now how does God beseech them? Read one of the Lord’s beseechings in the 1st chapter of Isaiah, how imploring it is! He says, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me.” For several verses the Lord expostulates, and then pleads—“Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Oh the tenderness of that invitation to reason together! There was first a burst of righteous indignation to arouse the mind, and then came the voice of most tender pity to allure the heart. What matchless pleading! If this is how ministers are to beseech, we have a high standard set before us. We are to plead with men with a boundless freedom of invitation and gentleness of expostulation, so I gather from the 55th of Isaiah, where you have another of God’s pleadings—“Ho, everyone that thirsts, come you to the waters, and he that has no money; come you, buy, and eat; yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Oh, think of God’s talking like this to His creatures, and arguing with them—“Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently unto Me and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” Oh what freeness is there, what concern for their welfare, what regret at their mistakes! What gentle upbraiding, as though it were not for His sake but for theirs! “Why do you spend money for that which is not bread?” Why disappoint yourselves, and waste your strength? It is after this fashion that we are to beseech men to be reconciled to God! Then take another instance of matchless pleading. Turn to Ezekiel 33:11—“As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” And then He says to them, “Turn you, turn you from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?” He swears first, to show his deep sincerity that He has no joy in a sinner’s death, and then turns to entreaty—“Turn you, turn you, why will you die?” There is a passage in Jeremiah 44:4 where the Lord is represented as sending His prophets to say to the people in His name—“Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate.” There is something so appealing, so pathetic about these words, that I dare not attempt to open them up to you. Their condescension and tenderness are unspeakable.

Perhaps if there is one passage in Scripture in which the entreaties of God are set in a more tender light than in any other, it is to be found in the book of Hosea, 11:8, where the Lord cries, “How shall I give you up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver you, Israel? How shall I make you as Admah? How shall I set you as Zeboim? My heart is turned within Me, My sympathy is stirred.” Oh, how God beseeches men, and He means His ministers to beseech them in the same way, with weeping tenderness, and melting pathos, if perhaps the stony heart may be softened, and the iron sinew be bowed.

Do I hear some strong doctrine brother say, “I do not like this”? My dear brother, I am not careful to answer you in this matter. If the Lord appoints it, you ought to approve it, and if you do not, you are wrong, and the Scripture is not. If God beseeches, and bids me beseech as He does, I will do it. And

though I am counted vile for it by you, then so must it be. Besides, it is no derogation for God to beseech His creatures. You say we make God beg to His creatures. Assuredly that is how the Lord represents Himself—"All day long have I stretched out My hands to a disobedient and gainsaying generation." It is in the Scripture that He represents Himself as crying like a chapman at a fair, "Ho, everyone that thirsts come you to the waters," and bids the passersby to buy His wine and milk. It is wonderful condescension—if He had not so represented it, we dare not have done so. But as He has said it, we do but follow His footsteps, and quote His words. Besides, remember these entreaties of God, in which He stoops to our littleness, even when they do not prevail with man, do mysteriously affect the divine purpose. They are a savor of death unto death wherever they are not a savor of life unto life. But then, blessed be God, in thousands of cases they are the means by which His power works on men's hearts. They do bring men to be reconciled to Him.

But I must pass on. Our text, speaking of the manner of ministers, tells us that we are to *pray souls in Christ's stead*. That is to say, we are to preach as if Christ were preaching. Oh, what a model for the minister! "We pray you *in Christ's stead*!" I am to say to you who are not reconciled to God—"Be reconciled to Him," and I am to say it as if Jesus said it. That would not be in a light or trifling manner. That would not be in a cold official style. That would be with melting eyes and burning heart. How was Jesus Christ accustomed to implore men? Why, sometimes He prayed them by setting before them the evil of their ways. "For which of these works do you stone Me?" He asked. And so I am to inquire, "For which of God's works are you His enemy? Are you His enemy because He keeps you in life, because He has raised you from the bed of sickness? Are you His enemy because He gives you your bread and your water? Are you His enemy because He sends you the gospel? For which of these works do you hate Him?" Oh, wanton malice, to be at enmity with the infinitely good God! Sometimes Christ would plead with men on account of the uselessness of their rebellion. "What king," He asked, "will go to make war with another king without first sitting down to see whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him that comes against him with twenty thousand?" Why will you be God's enemy when you cannot win the battle? The flax may sooner contend with the flame, or the wax with the fire, than you with God. Oh, why, then, are you not reconciled to Him? Sometimes Jesus pleaded with men on account of the result of their sin, as He did when He stood on the brow of the hill, and looked down on Jerusalem, and said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets, and stone them which are sent unto you, how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." Remember that wonderful chapter in Matthew where He speaks of His coming with all the holy angels, and dividing the sheep from the goats? Remember the passages where He treats of the virgins who had no oil in their vessels with their lamps? Whoever puts the doctrine of hell into the background, Jesus never did. It is thought in these days that we had better not say much concerning the terrors of the law, but so thought not the Christ of Galilee. His ministry was full of the honest warning which proves a tender heart. Oh, sinners, you will be lost unless you lay hold on Christ! And to be lost is something unutterably terrible! Oh the wrath to come! The wrath to come! Who among you will endure the devouring fires? Who will dwell in everlasting burning? Thus the Savior invited. Thus He besought men. And so are we to beseech them!

And then you know in what style Jesus pleaded the love of God. I do not say He put it into words that I can quote, but remember the parable of the Prodigal Son—"When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." Was not that an eloquent discourse upon the abounding mercy of the great Father in heaven, and did not Jesus then tell how willingly God receives the penitent, and how gladly He puts away every sin? And, oh, how He implored man to be reconciled in such sweet words as these—"Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And what a word was that when He said, "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." Never such a pleader as Jesus, His birth among men and dwelling here on earth was a plea. His actions were pleas. His death was the master plea. Each groan seemed to say, "Man, be reconciled to God!" And His last expiring cry of, "It is finished," what was it but saying, "I have put away everything that separates a sinner and his God"? Be reconciled to God was the true meaning of that *consummatum est* with which He closed His agony.

Once more, it is taught us in the text that *the duty of the true minister is to bring this matter home and press it*. We pray you in Christ's stead, *be you reconciled to God*. It comes to this with you, my friend, God says to you this morning, "*Throw down your weapons*; why do you contend with your Maker? What have I done that you should despise Me? Poor creature that I made, what have I done that you should hate Me? I breathed into your nostrils your breath. What have I done that you should spend it in speaking against Me? That throbbing heart of yours, I give it every pulse; what have I done that you should forget Me, that My day should be a weariness, and My worship should be an abhorrence to you? I have raised you from the bed of sickness; I have given you many comforts; I spared your child when she was sick; I have prospered your efforts in business; I have done a thousand things for you—do I deserve to be forgotten? Is it right that your heart should be warm to your wife, and your child, and cold to Me?" My God, my soul is in sympathy with You, that You should be forgotten of your creatures. There is not one of us that love to be treated unkindly by those to whom we have been kind. Ingratitude is one of the worst of ills. It bites like an adder's fang, and as an unkind child wounds to the quick—and will you be such to your Maker? Will you be such to your Creator? Come, be quiet for a moment, and let the Lord speak with you, and let your honest conscience answer Him. What has He done that you should be His enemy? What has Christ done—look at His wounds!—that you should not love Him? What has the Holy Spirit done that you should resist Him? What will you gain by it? What will be the benefit in time or in eternity? I have been almost every week to the grave lately with some one or other of my congregation. Soon I may have to be there with you, if I am not carried there myself. Well, and what will be the wisdom, when you are dead, of having lived without God? What will be the profit of having gained the whole world, and having neglected your Maker? "Come, O Man, hear you His words, and be reconciled to Him!"

I said throw down your weapons, but I have, now, another message. *Accept the Lord Jesus*. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little." There is life in a look at the Crucified One. Jesus asks no hard thing of you. God your Father does not ask you to do impossibilities, or to prepare yourself by a long round of performances. His command is most simple and plain. Trust in Jesus, and you shall be saved, and being saved, you shall love your God, and then all war between you and God will be over. God, the Eternal One, will bend from heaven to embrace His once erring child, and you shall feel the kisses of His love, while in your heart there shall be music, dancing, joy, and feasting because you have come back to God. I do not know how to say more, or how to plead more strongly. I would God that He would beseech you, and that Jesus Christ would pray you, and that the Spirit of God would sweetly touch the secret springs of your will, that you might say—

*"I yield, by sovereign grace subdued,
Who can resist its charms?
And throw myself, by love pursued,
Into my Savior's arms."*

God be thanked for it. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 1.

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